

Circle Ministry 2007-2008

*Siblings*

Rev. Jan Carlsson-Bull for Circle Ministry at First Parish UU Cohasset, MA, 2007-2008

With primary contributions from Jack Martin

**Note: See the Circle Ministry Session Sequence for process guidelines.**

**Gathering, Welcoming (2 minutes)**

**Chalice lighting & Opening words (1 minute)**

What is family?

Surely it is the parent or parents who raised us,  
perhaps the parent who gave birth to us,  
perhaps aunts and uncles, cousins and cousins-once-removed.  
Perhaps it's a daughter or more, a son or more,  
perhaps a stepchild or two.

Then again, family may be the friend we've known so many years,  
the one to whom you can say, "We hold each other's history."  
Then again, family may be the folks next door,  
who were there when you went through that rough time last year,  
and you were the first one on their doorstep when they went through theirs.

Then again, family may also be those with whom you  
sit in this circle right now.

Together, you have held silence over questions  
that called for reflection before response.

Together, you have held stories,  
that called for deep listening  
and sometimes called for a deep belly laugh  
and sometimes called for tears.

In the family of this circle, you are invited to say:  
"This is who I am," with a story as to how,  
trusting that you will be heard and accepted.

However you think about family,  
this is what family feels like, right here, right now,  
when we stop and listen and discover and discern,  
story after story, silence after silence.

**Check-in/Sharing (3-4 minutes@ - 30-40 minutes)**

**Discussion of congregational and community service plans underway and ventures completed (10-20 minutes)**

**Topical Discussion (60 minutes)**

[See Circle Ministry Session Sequence as a reminder of the structure of this segment.]

First response

Cross-conversation

## **Topic: Siblings**

Ask people about their feelings toward their brothers and sisters, and you rarely get a neutral response. Whether we view our siblings as a source of delight or heartbreak, it is clear that sibling bonds are often the most emotionally charged relationships in our lives.

In *The Accidental Bond: The Power of Sibling Relationship*, psychologist Susan Scarf Merrell reminds us that: “Siblings can be discomfoting reminders that each person grows up in a family that is his and his alone. One adult sibling’s memory of an overwhelming and unsympathetic mother can be difficult to reconcile with another’s recollection of a loving caretaker. Each person’s truth is valid, a function of the unique individuals doing the perceiving and of the particular life phase and experience of each. This is one reason that, so frequently, grown brothers and sisters go through uncomfortable phases in their relationships.”

In *The Relationship Cure*, experimental psychologist and professor John M. Gottman, Ph.D., offers another insight into sibling relationships: “As people grow up and leave home, sibling relationships typically take a backseat to other bonds like marriage, friendship, and parenthood. But as we approach middle age, two things typically happen that bring our siblings back into the forefront of our lives. First, our parents grow old, requiring siblings to come together around such issues as long-term care, the parents’ end-of-life decisions, and healing from the grief of a parent’s death. And second, we start to think more deeply about the stories of our own lives; how our childhood relationships with parents and brothers and sisters affected us; what the bonds of extended family mean to us today. Our adult relationships with our siblings loom large as we grapple with these issues and questions.”

[Options for the conversation to follow:

- 1) Read and consider one question before going to the next; or
- 2) Choose and consider only one question; or
- 3) If you decide to consider both questions, you may not do a “go-around” for the second.]

Take a moment of silence and consider your response to these questions, and if you don’t have siblings, you might want to think about your relationship with a close friend who feels like a sister or brother.

1. How important is it for you to talk openly about the past with your siblings? How readily have you discussed with her/him/them your individual perceptions of your family growing up? How easily have you been able to talk with her/him/them about your memories of difficult times and perhaps about how family members were hurt?
2. How close or distant are you from your siblings? Tell a story that illustrates this. What would you like to change, if anything, about how you relate to one another?

What concluding thoughts would you like to share?

## **Feedback (15 minutes)**

Thank the group. Explain that for the next session, we’ll consider the topic, “Sin.”

Note that the session plan for this gathering is available for group members as we leave.

## **Closing (1 minute)**

- How to be our brother’s keeper, brother or not?
- How to be our sister’s keeper, sister or not?
- How to be family—caring, attentive, risk-taking, story-telling family?
- Care, pay attention, take the risk, cherish the stories, and hold each other in your ever-hopeful hearts.

## Circle Ministry Session Sequence for Facilitators

### First Parish Unitarian Universalist – Cohasset

The suggested sequence and time allocations spelled out below will help you who facilitate our Circle Ministry sessions to ensure that every participant will have a voice over the two-hour timeframe that comprises a Circle Ministry session.

#### **Gathering, Welcoming (5 minutes)**

During the **first meeting** of your group, you might want to offer clarification on questions that people have raised:

**How long do the groups meet?** We're asking that each of the initial groups commit to meeting at least through May. At that time or before, you can each decide whether you want to continue in this group, move to another group, or not continue.

**Why a designated facilitator and a co-facilitator?** As similar groups have met in other congregations, facilitators provide assurance that each person has a voice, that we stay on topic, and that we sustain respectful dialogue. Even experiences at First Parish have taught us that groups without designated facilitators tend to fray. There are exceptions; but this is the general learning. The structure provided by facilitators is ultimately satisfying for everyone.

**Introduce your co-facilitator.** Clarify that this person will step in if you can't be there, and if additional congregants want to join groups and there aren't enough open spaces, s/he stands ready to be the lead facilitator for this new group.

**Where will we meet regularly?**

This first meeting is at [facilitator or co-facilitator]'s home. For our subsequent sessions, we're asking that one of you volunteer to be a home host. That's all you have to do! Don't clean your house for us. Don't prepare refreshments. Just open your door and welcome us in. By the end of this evening's session, I hope we'll have a home host.

**How can we ensure respectful dialogue and the structure that was introduced about Circle Ministry?** Our focus next week will be a behavioral covenant. I'll provide a basic covenant, and we'll go from there.

You'll continue to have questions. Toward the end of each session there will be a time to raise them.

#### **Chalice lighting (1-2 minutes)**

#### **Check-in/Sharing (2-3 minutes@ - 20-30 minutes)**

Ask each person to share **what's on their mind and heart**. You may wish to have a timekeeper to gently remind anyone who moves beyond the allotted check-in time that their sharing is valued and we need to ensure a voice for everyone. If the speaker persists, ask her/him firmly and respectfully to conclude. IF as the sessions unfold, someone arrives who has had a particularly rending experience, decide as a group your willingness to give this person extra time.

NO feedback, NO cross-talk during this segment. Simply be with each other in deep listening.

#### **“Business” matters (up to 10 minutes)**

At year's beginning, review Behavioral Covenants and session structures.

**Later in the year, you'll want to discuss and plan your service projects.**

**Discussion (60 minutes)**

**Introduce** the topic and the questions (2 minutes)

Ask folks to **pause and ponder** this in a period of silence. (2 minutes)

**First response:** Ask folks to register their initial thoughts—in random order, but with **no feedback** during this segment.

**Then: Cross-conversation.** IF one person dominates, gently remind that person that we need to allow time for every group member to speak.

**Conclude discussion** with request for **final statements/last thoughts on this topic**—in random order, but with **no feedback**.

**Feedback (5-10 minutes)**

Ask participants **what they liked** about this session. **What would they change? How?** Take note during succeeding sessions of **who isn't present**. Let the other members know that you'll follow up to determine if all is well or not. Remind members that if they absolutely can't make a session, to please let you know.

**Closing (2 minutes)**

**Note: Have copies of the session available for participants at the conclusion of each session, but don't distribute them up front. If someone asks about having an outline in hand, explain that we all tend to connect more freely when we're not tied to a paper.**

**Thank you!**

**You are a valued leader in Circle Ministry as it unfolds within our faith community!**